

Paṭhamā Arahatā Sutta

The First Discourse on the Arhats

[How arhats arise]

(Sāmyutta Nikāya 22.76/3:82-84)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2008

Introduction

1.1 There are two discourses entitled Arahatā Sutta, “the Discourse on the Arhats,” that is, **the Paṭhamā Arahatā Sutta** (S 22.76), “the First Discourse on the Arhats” and **the Duttiya Arahatā Sutta** (S 22.77),¹ “the Second Discourse on the Arhats,” that have identical passages, except that the first contains closing verses, while the second does not. The suttas are, as the titles suggest, about arhats.

The prose section of the Sutta is divided into two clear parts: §1 “The 3 characteristics of the 5 aggregates” and §2 “the revulsion at the 5 aggregates & the attaining of arhathood.” The first is the method and the second is the goal. In fact, the first section—on the method—is clearly on the attainment of streamwinning. We see here the very ancient goals of streamwinning and arhathood, without any mention of the intervening levels of once-returned or non-returned.

The first section [§1], on the streamwinner, deals with the trainee struggling to see the five aggregates as being *impermanent*, *suffering* and *not-self*, so that we do not identify with the aggregates or any of them. In simpler terms, we are talking about the body and the mind, with either of which it is easy to identify so that we have a false sense of security and permanence—this is technically called the self-identity view (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*), which is what the streamwinner first and foremost abandons.²

While the streamwinner continues to work more fully understanding the three characteristics of the five aggregates—especially that of not-self—the arhat has already fully understood them.³ In §2 we see the *nibbidā* formula⁴ being used, showing how the realization of the characteristics leads to the attaining of arhathood. Finally, the arhat is declared as being the best of beings.

1.2 The first section of the Sutta [§1]—on the three characteristics of the five aggregates—has been translated in two ways: the interlinear (with the Pali text on the right), and in idiomatic English. The interlinear translation serves as an introduction to the Pali sounds of the important pericope, which contains the Sutta’s key teaching. Once you are familiar with the English passage, you could go on to look up its Pali version, line by line. This is best done by recording a reading of these passages. The English pericope could be recorded by itself. Or, a line of the Pali text could be read followed by the English translation. Such readings serve well as “inspired listening” in itself, or as a prelude to meditation.

This important pericope [§1] is also found in the following discourses:

the Yad Anicca Sutta	(the Discourse on What is Impermanent)	(S 22.15/3:22),
the Paṭhamā Anicca Sutta	(the Discourse on the Impermanent 1)	(S 22.45/3:45),
the Duttiya Anicca Sutta	(the Discourse on the Impermanent 2)	(S 22.46/3:45 f),

and is quoted in the Alaggadūpama Sutta commentary (MA 2:114).

The Yad Anicca Sutta (S 22.15), found in the Khandha Sāmyutta (S 27), gives all the three characteristics (the impermanent = *anicca*, the suffering = *dukkha* and the not-self = *anattā*)⁵ relating them to the five aggregates. Two discourses follow immediately, namely, the Yam Dukkha Sutta (S 22.16) and the Yad Anattā Sutta (S 22.17)—are of interest here. **The Yam Dukkha Sutta** (S 22.16/3:22) omits the first characteristic (*anicca*), and uses the formula *yam dukkham tad anattā*, and so on. **The Yad Anattā Sutta** (S 22.17/3:22 f) omits both the first and second characteristics (*anicca* and *dukkha*), and has *yad anattā tam n’etaṃ mama*, etc.

¹ S 22.77/3:84 = SD 42.9.

² See **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3 (5).

³ See eg **Samaṇa-m-ācala S 1** (A 4.87/2:86-88) & SD 20.13 Intro (2).

⁴ See *Nibbidā* = SD 20.1.

⁵ See **Dhamma,niyāma S** (A 3.134/1:285) = SD 26.8.

Similarly, the discourses of **the Anicca Vagga** (the chapter on the impermanent) of the Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta, “the connected sayings on the six sense-bases” (S 35.1-12/4:1-5), apply each of the three characteristics to the internal senses (eye, ear, etc), the sense-objects (forms, sounds, etc), past and future senses, and past and future objects, totally 12 suttas.

A more detailed pericope—including *the totality formula*⁶—is found in such discourses as follows:

the Anatta,lakkhaṇa Sutta	(S 22.59.17-21/3:68 = V 1:14 f) = SD 1.2,
the Alaggadūpama Sutta	(M 22.27/1:139) = SD 3.13,
the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta	(M 62.8-12/1:421-423) = SD 3.11 (with the 5 elements, ie earth, water, fire, wind, space; also see:
the (Dhātu) Rāhula Sutta	(A 4.177/2:164 f for a shorter version); and
the Susima Sutta	(S 12.70/2:125) = SD 16.8.

1.3 The verse section, praising the arhat, has eight stanzas, in *śloka* of 4 syllables to a quatrain, so that each stanza is 32 syllables. This is common in the Dhammapada verses, and is a popular and ancient poetic style. However, the verse section itself could be late due to mention of such technical terms as *pañca-k, khandha* (the five aggregates) [§5], and *satta, ratana* (“the seven jewels,” alluding to the emblems of the *cakka, vatti* or world monarch).

That the verse section is a later addition, even post-Buddha, is further supported by the presence of the following discourse of the same name (S 22.77), containing the same prose text verbatim, but *without* the verse section. Evidently the *Dutiya Arahatā Sutta* (S 22.77) is older than the *Paṭhama Arahatā Sutta* (S 22.76). For, it is highly unlikely that a longer sutta would be shortened with a whole verse section removed. Rather, it is more likely that such a section would be added later.

As a whole, the verse section is a paean of joy to the arhats, reflecting on their qualities. In other words, it is a form of reflection on the holy community of saints (*saṅghānussati*).⁷

— — —

⁶ The totality formula is applied in this manner: “...any kind of ⟨form, etc⟩ whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all ⟨forms, etc⟩ should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (*Tasmātiha, bhikkhave, yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ atītānāgata, paccuppannaṃ ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumam vā hīnaṃ vā pañītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbam rūpaṃ—n’etaṃ mama, n’eso’ham asmi, na m’eso attā ’ti evam etaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ samma-p, paññāya daṭṭhabbāṃ*). This totality formula (in the classification of the aggregates) is explained in detail in the *Vibhaṅga* and briefly in the *Visuddhi, magga* as follows: “**internal**” = physical sense-organs; “**external**” = physical sense-objects; “**gross**” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “**subtle**” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “**inferior**” = unpleasant and unacceptable sense-experiences [sense-world existence]; “**superior**” = pleasant and acceptable sense-experiences [form & formless existences]; “**far**” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “**near**” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the *Vibhaṅga* exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41).

⁷ See **Aṭṭha, puggala S 1** (A 8.59/4:292) = SD 15.10a.

The First Discourse on the Arhats

(S 22.76/3:82-84)

- 1 At Sāvattihī.
- 2 There the Blessed One said:

(A) The 3 characteristics of the 5 aggregates [*Interlinear*]⁸

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>3 (1) <u>Form</u>, bhikkhus, is impermanent.
What is impermanent is suffering.
What is suffering is not-self.
As for what is not-self: [83]
'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self,'
thus, it should be seen with right wisdom.</p> | <p><i>Rūpaṃ bhikkhave aniccaṃ
yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ
yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā
yad anattā taṃ
n'etaṃ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na m'eso attā 'ti
evam etaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ samma-p, paññāya daṭṭhabbam</i></p> |
| <p>4 (2) <u>Feeling</u> is impermanent.
What is impermanent is suffering.
What is suffering is not-self.
As for what is not-self:
'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self,'
thus, it should be seen with right wisdom.</p> | <p><i>Vedanā aniccā
yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ
yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā
yad anattā taṃ
n'etaṃ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na m'eso attā 'ti
evam etaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ samma-p, paññāya daṭṭhabbam</i></p> |
| <p>5 (3) <u>Perception</u> is impermanent.
What is impermanent is suffering.
What is suffering is not-self.
As for what is not-self:
'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self,'
thus, it should be seen with right wisdom.</p> | <p><i>Saññā aniccā
yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ
yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā
yad anattā taṃ
n'etaṃ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na m'eso attā 'ti
evam etaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ samma-p, paññāya daṭṭhabbam</i></p> |
| <p>6 (4) <u>Formations</u> are impermanent.
What is impermanent is suffering.
What is suffering is not-self.
As for what is not-self:
'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self,'
thus, it should be seen with right wisdom.</p> | <p><i>Saṅkhārā aniccā
yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ
yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā
yad anattā taṃ
n'etaṃ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na m'eso attā 'ti
evam etaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ samma-p, paññāya daṭṭhabbam</i></p> |
| <p>7 (5) <u>Consciousness</u> is impermanent.
What is impermanent is suffering.
What is suffering is not-self.
As for what is not-self:
'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self,'
thus, it should be seen with right wisdom.</p> | <p><i>Viññāṇaṃ aniccaṃ
yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ
yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā
yad anattā taṃ
n'etaṃ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na m'eso attā 'ti
evam etaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ samma-p, paññāya daṭṭhabbam</i></p> |

(B) The 3 characteristics of the 5 aggregates⁹ [*Idiomatic*]

- 3 (1) Form, bhikkhus, is impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is not-self. What is not-self [83] should be seen with right wisdom, thus, 'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.'¹⁰

⁸ This "interlinear translation" section is the same passage rendered in "idiomatic" English in the following section. On this important pericope, see Intro (1.2).

⁹ This whole section is mutatis mutandis at **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35.24b/1:234 f) = SD 26.5. These are the characteristics of a learner (*sekha*). The arhat, on the other hand, not only has the right view of not-self, but has also abandoned all clinging, as the Buddha explains in the foll §2.

¹⁰ *N'etaṃ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na m'eso attā ti*. A brief version, "There can be no considering that (element) as 'I' or 'mine' or 'I am'" (*ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*) is found in **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28/1:184-191 §§6b-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22). This is opp of "the 3 grasplings" (*ti, vidha gāha*) formula: *etaṃ mama, eso 'ham asmi,*

- 4 Feeling, bhikshus, is impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is not-self. What is not-self should be seen with right wisdom, thus, ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
- 5 Perception, bhikshus, is impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is not-self. What is not-self should be seen with right wisdom, thus, ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
- 6 (4) Formations, bhikshus, are impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is not-self. What is not-self should be seen with right wisdom, thus, ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
- 7 (5) Consciousness, bhikshus, is impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is not-self. What is not-self should be seen with right wisdom, thus, ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

Revulsion at the 5 aggregates & the attaining of arhathood

- 8 Seeing thus, bhikshus, the wise noble disciple is revulsed at form; he is revulsed at feeling; he is revulsed at perception; he is revulsed at formations; he is revulsed at consciousness.
- 9 Feeling revulsed, lust fades away [he is dispassionate]. Through the fading away of lust [Through dispassion], he is liberated. When he is liberated, there comes the knowledge: ‘It (the mind) is liberated.’ He knows: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being.’
- 10 Bhikshus, to whatever extent there are the abodes of beings, even up to the peak of existence,¹¹ they are the foremost, the best in the world, that is to say, the arhats.”
- 11 The Blessed One said this. Having said that, the Well-gone [Sugata], the Teacher, further said this:¹²
- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>12 <i>Sukhino vata arahanto
taṇhā tesam na vijjati
asmī, māno samucchinnō
moha, jālaṃ padālitam</i></p> | <p>Happy indeed are the arhats!
No craving is found in them.
They have cut off the conceit “I am,”
broken through the net of delusion.</p> |
| <p>13 <i>Anejaṃ te anuppattā
cittaṃ tesam anāvilam
loke anupalittā te
brahma, bhūtā anāsavā</i></p> | <p>They have reached the unshakable,¹³
their minds are without disturbance [lucid],
unsullied by the world are they,
become perfect, influx-free.</p> |

eso me attā ti [§§12-16]. In **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:68), these formulas is applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/ 3:94-99) to the 4 primary elements. See also **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f). See **Pārileyya S**, SD 6.16 Intro (5). See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

¹¹ “The peak of existence,” *bhav’aggam*, or “the foremost existence.” This is the apex of the nine abodes of beings (*satt’āvāsa*), listed in **Nava Satt’āvāsa S** (A 9.24/4:401 = D 33.3.2(3)/3:263; also at 3:388), also at Khp 2; KhpA 86. As used in the Abhidhamma (Vbh 426,8) and Comys, the “foremost existence” is the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, the highest of the sentient world.

¹² On these verses, see Intro (1.1).

¹³ “The unshakable,” *anejaṃ*, or “imperturbable.” Comy: This is arhathood (*arahatta*), the abandoning of craving, which is ‘the agitating’ (*ejā*) (SA 2:282). See **Paṭhama Eja S** (S 35.90/4:64-66) & **Dutiya Eja S** (S 35.91/4:66 f).

- 14 *Pañca-k, khandhe pariññāya
satta saddhamma, gocarā
pasaṁsiyā sappurisā
puttā buddhassa orasā* Having fully understood the five aggregates, the seven good qualities¹⁴ are their pasture— these praiseworthy true individuals are the sons of the Buddha.
- 15 *Satta, ratana, sampannā
tīsu sikkhāsu sikkhitā
anuvicaranti mahā, vīrā
pahīna, bhaya, bheravā* Endowed with the seven jewels,¹⁵ trained in the three trainings,¹⁶ the great heroes wander about, having abandoned fear and trembling.
- 16 *Dasa-h-aṅgehi sampannā
Mahā, nāgā samāhitā
ete kho seṭṭhā lokasmim
taṅhā tesam na vijjati* Endowed with the ten factors,¹⁷ are the great nagas,¹⁸ mentally concentrated— they are indeed the best in the world, there is no craving in them.¹⁹
- 17 *Asekha, ñāṇam uppannam
antimo 'yam samussayo
yo sāro brahma, cariyassa
tasmin apara, paccayā* The adept's wisdom has arisen (in them), this is the last body to be borne, the heart²⁰ of the holy life, is in him, independent of others. [84]
- 18 *Vidhāsu na vikampanti
vipparamuttā punabbhavā
danta, bhūmim anuppattā
te loke vijitāvino* They tremble not at discrimination,²¹ released from rebirth,²² having reached the ground of the tamed, they are conquerors in the world.

¹⁴ “The seven good qualities,” *satta saddhamma*. They are: faith (*saddhā*), moral shame (*hiri*), moral fear (*ottappa*), great learning (*bahu, sacca*), applied energy (*āradhā, viriya*), stable mindfulness (*upaṭṭhita, sati*), and wisdom (*paññā*) (SA 2:282). These seven are detailed in **Sekha S** (M 53) as adjs: *saddho, hirimā, ottappī, bahussuto, āradhā, viriyo, upaṭṭhita, sati, paññavā* (M 53.11-17/1:356) = SD 21.14; listed in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.3(5)/3:252). **Sekha S** Comy glosses it as *sundara, dhammehi sataṁ vā sappurisānaṁ dhammehi* (“with beautiful dharmas or with the dharmas of a true person”) (MA 3:29): I’m not sure what to make of *sataṁ* here: it is prob wr, which perhaps should read *sattehi*. Aṅguttara Comy glosses *saddhammehi* as *sudhammehi* (“with good dharmas”) (AA 4:56). Cf D 3:252, 282; M 3:23; A 4:108 ff.

¹⁵ “The seven jewels,” *satta ratana*, are the 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*), viz, mindfulness, dharma-investigation, energy, zest, tranquillity, concentration, and equanimity (SA 2:282). For details, see **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17/2: 169-199) = SD 36.12; see also (**Āhāra**) **Kāya S** (S 46.42/5:65-67).

¹⁶ “The three trainings,” *tī sikkhā*, namely, the training in higher virtue, higher mind, and higher wisdom: see (**Ānanda**) **Subha S** (D 10/1:204-210) = SD 40a.13; (**Ti**) **Sikkhā S** (A 3.88/1:235 f) = SD 24.10c.

¹⁷ “The ten factors,” *dasa aṅga*, are factors (*aṅga*) of the adept (*asekha*) (SA 2:282), ie, the 10 rightness (*sammata*), viz, the 8 supramundane path factors, together with right knowledge (*sammā ñāṇa*) and right liberation (*sammā vimutti*). They are the qualities of the adept (*asekha*), the one who has fulfilled his training, the arhat. See **Bhaddāli S** (M 65.34/1:446 f) = SD 56.2; **Samāṇa, maṇḍika S** (M 78.14/2:29) = SD 18.9; **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117.34/3:75 f) = SD 6.10.

¹⁸ *Nāga*, may refer to a bull elephant (regarded as noble animals) or to mythical dragons, but here as a metaphor for the arhat as a noble human: for details, see S:B vol 1 n84.

¹⁹ Comy alludes to **Raṭṭha, pāla S** (M 82): “The world is lacking, insatiate, the slave of craving, maharajah, thus (says) the Blessed One” (*ūno loko atitto taṅhā, dāso 'ti kho, mahārāja, tena bhagavatā*) (M 82.36/2:68). (SA 2:282)

²⁰ *Sāro*, also tr as “essence” = “fruition” (*phala*) (SA 2:282), ie accomplished in sainthood.

²¹ This stanza is qu at Nm 1:243. Comy: *Vidhā* refers to the 3 kinds of conceit (superior, inferior and equal) (SA 2:282): see “**Me**” the Nature of Conceit = SD 19.2a. See foll n.

²² Lines ab qu at Nm 1:243.

19 *Uddham tiriyaṃ apācīnaṃ
nandī tesāṃ na vijjati
nadanti te sīha, nādaṃ
buddhā loke anuttarā*

Above, across, below,²³
they have no delight for them,
roaring their lion-roar:
the Buddhas are supreme in the world!

— evaṃ —

081031; 081102; 090819

²³ Comy interprets the line broadly, taking it as meaning (1) the body: from the soles of the feet to the crown, and in between; (2) time (karma & rebirth): the past, the future and the present; (3) the realms: the subhuman planes, the human world, and the divine world. (SA 2:282 f)